

ANNOUNCEMENT

IN MEMORIAM

DR. JOHN O. SAWYER, JR. 1939–2012

With deep admiration and loss, we reflect upon the passing of Dr. John O. Sawyer, Jr. (1939–2012), California plant ecologist extraordinaire. He died peacefully at his home amongst the redwoods on August 19, 2012, after battling cancer for over seven years. John was born in Chico, California, into the farmer's family of John and Barbara Sawyer. He is survived by his devoted wife Roberta Jane Cole, sister Dorothy Erickson, two sons Kevin and Jeffrey, and their mother Judy Sawyer. In addition, John was a "father" to many former students, and he was close friends with many of his colleagues, especially Dr. James P. Smith, Jr., his best friend.

Dr. Sawyer completed a B.A. at California State University, Chico, and then an M.S. and Ph.D. at Purdue University, where he studied the

ecology of tropical ecosystems. John joined the faculty at Humboldt State University in 1966. During more than 40 years as Professor of Botany, John became a nationally recognized authority on conifers, plant ecology, and the vegetation of California, especially that of the Klamath Mountains ecoregion. He has contributed greatly to our knowledge of California plants and plant ecology with over 40 scientific publications. These include taxonomic treatments of *Ribes* and Rhamnaceae in California and three books—*Trees and Shrubs of California*, *Northwest California: A Natural History*, and *A Manual of California Vegetation* (in two editions), which has been adopted as the state's standard for vegetation classification.

In supporting over 50 graduate students and scores of undergraduates, he fostered rigorous field-based and theoretical investigations of plant species and ecological systems across California, from the local Humboldt Bay area to the Klamaths, the Sierra Nevada, and the Mojave



John Sawyer backpacking along Stoney Ridge Trail, Trinity Alps. Photo by J. M. Evens.

and Sonoran deserts. His students and colleagues knew him as a teacher, mentor, scientist, author, and editor. John was a passionate theorist and classifier of nature, and he seemed to understand equally well relationships amongst his "people" as well as his "plants." He shaped the lives and pursuits of many of his past students, who now hold laudable positions at state and federal agencies, conservation organizations, consulting firms, and colleges and universities around the world.

Among his many awards and accolades, John was recognized in 1997 as Humboldt State University's Scholar of the Year, in 2008 by the California Botanical Society's dedication of Volume 55 of *Madroño* to him, and in 2010 as one of the recipients of Santa Barbara Botanic Garden's Conservation Award for the year's most influential contribution to botanical literature. He actively participated in several organizations, including the California Native Plant Society (CNPS), the Ecological Society of America's Vegetation Panel, and Save the Redwoods League. For CNPS, John was a past President

and Fellow and a founding member of the Vegetation Committee; he was also a founding member and first president of the North Coast Chapter. In his free time, John was an avid backpacker; he also traveled extensively and loved music and art. He was instrumental in the protection of the Lanphere Dunes along the Humboldt Bay and the Russian Wilderness, an area that contains the richest concentration of conifer species in the Klamath Mountains.

John believed that instruction in the field was always the most informative. With that thought in mind, the John O. Sawyer, Jr. Endowment has been established at HSU to continue supporting field studies in botany and plant ecology. For more details about his life, accomplishments, and ways to contribute in his memory, please see the following link: <http://www.cnps.org/cnps/about/memorial/johnsawyer/index.php>.

—Julie M. Evens, Vegetation Program Director, California Native Plant Society; Todd Keeler-Wolf, Ph.D., Senior Vegetation Ecologist, California Department of Fish and Wildlife.